

Fact sheet

Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto)

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis, or crypto, is a diarrheal illness caused by tiny cryptosporidium parasites. This parasite can survive outside the body for long periods of time and can contaminate chlorinated pools.

Cryptosporidium is one of the most common causes of waterborne disease among humans in the United States.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Once the parasite enters your body, it travels to your small intestine, and then burrows into the walls of your intestines. Later, the parasites are shed in your poop. Crypto can be spread when you:

- Swallow recreational water (e.g., water in swimming pools, fountains, lakes, rivers) contaminated with crypto
- Drink untreated water from a lake or river contaminated with crypto
- Swallow water, ice, or beverages contaminated with poop from infected humans or animals
- Eat undercooked food or drink unpasteurized/raw apple cider or milk that gets contaminated with crypto
- Touch your mouth with hands contaminated through a variety of activities, such as touching surfaces or objects (e.g., toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) that have been contaminated by poop from an infected person, changing diapers,

caring for an infected person, and touching an infected animal

- Are exposed to poop from an infected person through oral-anal sexual contact

Crypto is not spread through contact with blood.

What are the signs and symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The first signs and symptoms of cryptosporidiosis usually appear within a week after infection and may include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 10 days after infection and may last for up to 2 weeks, though they may come and go periodically for up to a month. Some people with cryptosporidiosis have no symptoms.

Who is most at risk?

There are many people who can be at risk for infection. These include those who work at or attend childcare centers, pregnant women, people with severely weakened immune

systems, international travelers, people who drink unfiltered/untreated water (including water from unprotected wells), swimmers who swallow contaminated water, people who handle infected animals like calves or sheep, and people who are exposed to poop through sexual contact.

What type of health problems are caused by cryptosporidiosis?

People can get dehydrated because of the diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids. Young children and pregnant women are especially at risk. Symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness in people who have severely weakened immune systems.

How is cryptosporidiosis diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask you to submit a stool sample to check for infection. Because testing for crypto can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool specimens over several days. Most laboratories don't routinely test for crypto, so your healthcare provider should specifically request testing for crypto.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment. If you have diarrhea, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Anti-diarrheal medicine may help slow down diarrhea, but talk to your healthcare provider before taking it. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea may be especially life threatening to babies; therefore, parents should talk to their healthcare provider about

fluid replacement therapy options for infants. Specific therapy may be necessary for people with HIV.

How can cryptosporidiosis be prevented?

- Wash hands with soap and water after you use the toilet, before you handle or eat food (especially for persons with diarrhea), and after every diaper change, even if you wear gloves.
- Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea (essential for children in diapers)
- Avoid water that might be contaminated
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating
- Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems
- Reduce contact with poop during sex by washing your hands, anus, and genitals before and after sex, and using barrier methods

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)

